

NEIGHBORHOOD NETWORKS

**Moderator: Michelle Higgs
September 20, 2005
3:00 p.m. (EDT)**

Operator: Good day and welcome to this Neighborhood Networks conference call. This call is being recorded.

At this time, I would like to turn the call over to Ms. Michelle Higgs. Please go ahead.

Michelle Higgs: Thank you, James. Good afternoon everyone, and welcome to the Neighborhood Networks September conference call. The topic for today's call is Basic Fund Development.

My name, as you've heard, is Michelle Higgs and I'm technical assistant coordinator with Neighborhood Networks. I'm a member of a team that works with you to address the technical assistance needs of the various Neighborhood Networks around the country.

First, given the nature of the fury in the weather the past few weeks, I have the following announcements to make. The first involves the location of New Orleans employees. This is released by the Department of Housing & Urban Development. New Orleans Field Office Director, Marvel Robertson, announced on Tuesday, September 13th, that all 85 employees of the New Orleans office have been located. Although most employees evacuated before Hurricane Katrina hit the city, two had to be rescued from their homes and airlifted to safety.

From her temporary office in Ft. Worth, Ms. Robertson expressed appreciation to the Office of Human Resources in Ft. Worth and Atlanta, as well as to the Inspector General for investigations for their help in locating employees.

During the initial contact, employees were assured of receiving regular paychecks and having their jobs available when they're able to return to work. Employees were also encouraged to visit any HUD office if computer access was needed to register with FEMA for assistance with search with family members. According to Ms. Robertson, employees responded very positively to HUD's efforts to locate them and offer support and assistance.

Now, before I turn this call over to our speaker for this afternoon, I'd like you to know that we have 17 new centers to welcome to the Neighborhood. And forgive me; I had one more message to give you. We had a second speaker who was to participate in this afternoon's call and because of the storm now raging in Florida, she was unable to participate. So we all wish her well and hope that she'll be able to join us on another call.

Now, I want to talk about these 17 centers that we have to welcome to the Neighborhood. It's a lot of centers to talk about and I hope you can keep up with me because I promise not to go through them like a small print on a contract, but I have to read fast.

We will salute Louisiana by starting with the Village de Memoire I and II, and Alabama, with their center, Cathedral Place. There are nine centers from the state of Pennsylvania alone. University Square, Opportunities Tower III Neighborhood Networks Computer Learning Center, Hartford Village Computer Center, the Galilee Pavilion Neighborhood Networks Center, the Schoolyard Square Apartments Neighborhood Networks Center, Woodmont Gardens Neighborhood Networks Center, Woodstock Neighborhood Networks Center, and Germane Harbor, Inc. We need to hear it for Pennsylvania. They did a great job! And in Minnesota, there's Parkview Apartments Opportunity Center, and in Wyoming there's Springhill Neighborhood Networks

Center. In Kansas, there's the First Apartment Resident Technology Center, and then there's Agua Azul in New Mexico. And New York's newest center is Long Beach Martin Luther King Center, Incorporated. Congratulations to all.

As you're aware, the Strategic Tracking And Reporting Tool, known as the START business plan, contains resource materials that help centers perform the activities that are so important to assessing residents' interests and needs, as well as mapping assets in the community and crafting a budget for the center. START is also a key to developing a fundraising strategy because it helps center directors cast a firm eye at their center's strengths and weaknesses. And it also helps to strengthen a center's profile as a business, making the center more attractive to potential partners. These partnerships are essential when assisting residents in their pursuit of educational advancement, employment, or career growth, or seeking out funding opportunities.

If you have questions about the START business plan or general questions pertaining to Neighborhood Networks, please call the toll-free Neighborhood Networks Information line at (888) 312-2743. You can also visit the Neighborhood Networks Web site at www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org. I also want to remind listeners that an audio and verbatim transcript of this call will be made available on the Neighborhood Networks site in about two weeks.

And now about our topic for today: Basic Fund Development. You, no doubt, realize that a successful, vital Neighborhood Networks center does not spring up completely out of whole cloth. It is worked together like a quilt made by grandma's hands and when you listen to the presentation today, you'll understand how close to the truth that analogy is.

In order to plan for the development and maintenance of programs, centers must plan for the development and maintenance of a fund base to sustain them for new and young centers. Particularly, it is important to develop a strategy to provide for the nourishment and growth of the

center. There are a number of ways to approach this mission and from what I understand from our speaker today, the mission starts with commitment, fueled by passion, and burns strong with persistence. There are some basics, however, that will put you on the right path to success in creating a fund development strategy.

Our speaker who's been there and done that, as the kids say – and I never thought I'd hear myself say that – she's here to share her wisdom with you today. I want to speak about Ms. Sonya Manners. She's director of the Dartmouth Square Neighborhood Networks Center in Inkster, Michigan.

Through the development of strong relationships and partnerships in the community, Dartmouth Square has been able to overcome some obstacles and celebrate notable successes. One of those successes was Dartmouth Square's recent award from the Beaumont Foundation. An award that allowed them to get 10 laptop computers, including the required software, secure cart, and workgroup server. And, oh, did I say there was whip cream on top? It was a really good award. I would refer you to the Neighborhood Networks Web site at www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org for the complete success story.

I want to share with you, as I usually do, a couple of success stories from the Web site. Now, I have to tell you that Ms. Manners has one that I hope she'll be able to share with you, but I also have these others that also address the topic of fundraising.

One takes place in Durango, Colorado, and it's entitled "Colorado Center Spreads the Wealth." It starts off, what do you do when you receive hundreds of printers that have to be distributed to community groups? You call in your friends. And this was a situation in which the Durango Housing Neighborhood Networks Center received 409 printers that did more than just print. They printed, they scanned, and they copied in some cases. And here they were distributed through a group called Gifts In Kind, which is an international nonprofit that partners with businesses and

nonprofit organizations to provide products and services to improve the lives in communities around the world. You can find more out about Gifts In Kind International through their Web site.

When the printers came to Durango Housing – at no cost to Durango Housing, I might add – the Southern Youth Tribe donated a forklift and the help of tribal employees to unload 26 pallets of printers into a temporary storage room that was also donated by the Ignacio Adult Learning Center. And then with help from a dozen nonprofit partners, Durango Housing members distributed the printers to nonprofits groups, Title I schools, and churches, which went on and on from there.

In talking about developing effective partnerships, they're saying that it's all a matter of give-and-take. The group with Durango worked hard to develop effective strategies to leverage local and national resources. One strategy was the crafting of individual letters to various community businesses. The letters were described on what the Neighborhood Networks program was and would emphasize the number of community participants. The letters would also share with the businesses what the center's needs were and asked the businesses to assist with meeting those needs. Those letters resulted in getting assistance from the local Home Depot store, from the grocery store that would provide snacks for the afterschool program, and from a bakery that regularly provides pastries to computer class participants. So that's one illustration of working together, which I think is part of fundraising.

The other story takes place in Dewitt, New York, and that got my attention because my old college roommate went to Dewitt Clinton and she lived in the same community, Springfield Gardens. Dewitt's program is called People In Action and the program got its start in 1990 – sorry – 1980 by helping four or five families to meet their daily needs. Today, that program serves more than 400 families and more than 200 young folks, ages one to 17, in the Springfield Gardens Apartment complex.

It's ready to take on even more responsibilities now because they received two \$15,000 grants from the Gifford Foundation and the Central New York Community Foundation. The grants were awarded to address the literacy and technology needs of the Springfield Gardens' residents.

The Gifford Foundation grant will help fund – help fund staff salaries and provide startup and operating capital for People in Action's Project Family; a program designed to build job readiness skills, and support participants in their job searches, and address broader literacy issues.

This program will benefit folks from infants to adults, and there's a quote here that says, "The program also strives to ensure that children and adults are connected to other programs throughout the community that will help them to develop a sense of dignity, self-reliance, importance, and reduces the cycle of poverty and violence." So, with a couple of good grants applied and a couple of good ways, you can really affect a community in some really positive, positive ways.

Now, I'm not going to talk anymore. I'm going to turn our call over to Ms. Sonya Manners. I had the experience of visiting her center when I went to Michigan to do my technical assistance duties, and it is absolutely a beautiful center, very well put together, phenomenal programs, and she works very hard to keep it that way. So I'm going to turn this on over to Sonya. Go ahead, Sonya.

Sonya Manners: Thank you, Michelle. Thank you. Hello, everyone, and thank you for participating in this conference call today. I hope to enlighten anybody with their needs or questions today.

I just want to give a little background on what Michelle stated about networking centers, new centers. I'm fairly new. I think I'm new, but a lot of people think that I'm an old kid on the block, but I look at it as being new to the point that everything that I do is new and refresh. It might be a little different from the last time because you're trying to find funding, you're trying to find partners,

and you're basically networking, and if you're talking to somebody that doesn't have a clue of what a Neighborhood Networks center is, guess what, it's new to you; it's not old.

To give some enlightenment on how to network your center for "partnershiping," I suggest that you start – if it is a property that is managed by a management company, your first step would be your management company. They need to tie in to what you're doing, and they need to know why you want to do it, and why you want to go forward with it.

Once you get the tie-in from the management company – not to say that everything falls into place because it doesn't. Not all the time does your for-profit management company want to tie in financially. We started our center with a Drug Elimination Grant, which is now no longer offered from the Department of HUD, so we have to be inventive with what we do.

Some of the things that I've done in the past: I've networked at the local business Chamber of Commerce meeting, I passed out cards, I passed out literature, I have my kids come with me to talk about our afterschool program, I have some of the adults maybe participate with me to talk about the adult programs that we offer. And it shows people like on hand exactly what it is you're doing when you have participants to the center accompany you to different functions like this.

The Chamber of Commerce offers a monthly meeting and all of your businesses in your area are kind of tied into it. And I don't only stay in my area. I go outside of my area so I kind of get around. I'm in Inkster, which is a small city, maybe three miles by three miles, but I have other cities around me like Romulus. And if you know Michigan and you know Detroit, Romulus is where our metro airport is at. So there's quite a few businesses and industries there. We have Taylor and we have Dearborn. Dearborn is known as the Arabic community in Detroit.

Not only have I networked at business Chamber of Commerce meetings, I've gone to government public meetings. I've even been able to get on their docket and I get on the docket just to say

who I am because the government meeting is televised over the cable channel. So right there I'm not only hitting the council with what we're doing, I'm hitting the general public that's watching this broadcast on the cable show. So that right there is free publicity.

I've attended church meetings, local church meetings. I've gotten church organizations to tie into some of the things that we've done. And in doing these meetings, I've met people and networked with people that had no clue that we even existed. And I recently told Michelle a story.

We were down in Florida. I don't know if I had an opportunity to meet anyone but – that's on this call. On the way back to the airport, I was speaking with my colleague about the workshop that I conducted and then we got to talking about how we started up the network and how we started up the center and there was a gentleman on the shuttle with us that was very interested. And, of course, me being who I am, I gave him everything from beginning to where we were at. And this gentleman was in Maryland. He was on his way back to Maryland with his family and we exchanged business cards and from there, have now created a good relationship, and he is sending monies to our center. So you can network anywhere. I don't care where I'm at. I could be at a sports game; I'm networking Neighborhood Networks.

Michelle Higgs: That's great.

Sonya Manners: Yes, the network is a – is a great and important factor, Michelle, when you're trying to make your center go. You have to be passionate about what you do.

Michelle Higgs: I'm going to ask a question here because it's one of the things that I've got from our discussion was that you are indeed passionate and sometimes it's difficult when you are passionate about what you're doing to communicate that in clear, concise ways. I often call it the elevator speech.

Sonya Manners: Yes, ma'am.

Michelle Higgs: As it goes from the first to the fifth floor, you can tell them everything about you. Is that something – I mean, our new centers arm that kind of information, and if not, what can they do to arm themselves?

Sonya Manners: Well, I think the best thing that anybody can do is educate yourself on why you're doing and what you're doing. If you don't have some type or form of compassion in what you're doing, it's not going to come over clear to present it to someone. If you weren't there at the beginning of the center or the center is revamping itself – they used to be in existence and it dropped by the wayside and now you're trying to revamp it. You have to know some history about it if you were not the initial person to get the center started, and you kind of have to educate yourself on what you're doing, how you're doing it, and why you're doing it. And funders want to know the what, when, why, and how – how can I help you – and I think we have this conversation when we go into philanthropy and grants and corporations that give out money. They have the money. They want to give it out. They want to give you what they have and they will help you to give you their money.

Michelle Higgs: They'll show you how.

Sonya Manners: It's not that they all want you to succeed in getting the money that they have for you. It's just that you have to know what their needs are, or you know, what they need from you. So in saying that, the elevator speech is know why you started, what you're doing, why you're doing it, and who it's affecting ...

Michelle Higgs: OK.

Sonya Manners: ... and sell it from the bottom of your heart.

Michelle Higgs: Yes, there you go, there you go.

Sonya Manners: Sell it from the bottom of your heart. If you got a tip there sell it.

Michelle Higgs: OK, I got you. I got you.

Now, tell me a little more about – when we had talked about the role of strategic planning and that gets to knowing what you're doing and how you're doing it, that then you would say is a bedrock of starting a whole fundraising program? Where would you say you'd start?

Sonya Manners: With starting a fundraiser program – that was the question – ...

Michelle Higgs: Yes.

Sonya Manners: ... you would – of course, you would get your board together if you have a nonprofit board or you would get your advisory board together if you have residents that come together to help you with the center. You don't want to make it a one-person show. Definitely, you don't because it'll be a one-sided event. You want to throw around different ideas and you have to conform to the community. I mean, you're not going to give some big scale, fancy doodad, and black-tie thing when the community around you is really low-key industrial. You know, if you know how the Fords coming out don't give a Fords' event.

Michelle Higgs: OK.

Sonya Manners: You have to be accommodating to the crowd that you're going to generate, whether it be government officials, business – local business owners, if its residents that's tying into it, if it's parents that's tying into an afterschool program, you know, be conscious of what you're trying to

raise money for. You know, if you're trying to raise money for technology, of course, you want to invite people from the technology industry. You know, why would you invite a daycare worker to – I mean, there's nothing wrong with it but, you know, you think about what you – what your goal is.

If the – if the eye of the prize is technology equipment, not technology software, then you want to gear in on people that can help you with the equipment. You want to get the IBM, the Hewlett-Packard, the Gateway. You want to get people from that industry to come to your event maybe or let them see what you have. If you're doing a college fair, college fairs are always good business – job fairs are always good to get other industries out into your community. Do something off-the-wall that's totally different from what you do every day to get different clientele of people into the center.

The key on fundraising is know what you're going after and don't be wishy-washy with it. You know, you got to have one focus of the event, and if too many people are at the table, the focus will go away, but you want enough people at the table so the focus doesn't stay one-sided.

Michelle Higgs: OK, OK. Now, in this instance, you're talking about an event and I'm always thinking – you know, you said don't have a Ford event if you don't have the Fords coming, but that's always where my mind goes. What other kind?

Sonya Manners: You know ...

Michelle Higgs:you know

Sonya Manners: You and me both, Michelle.

Michelle Higgs: I want to get dressed up, OK.

Sonya Manners: I get dressed up, yes.

Michelle Higgs: Right.

Sonya Manners: And if you don't want to give a picnic, you know, what I'm saying and you say oh, it's a black-tie affair, OK, that's a little off ...

Michelle Higgs: Yes.

Sonya Manners: ... you know.

Michelle Higgs: Yes.

Sonya Manners: You know, if you're going to give a picnic, you want to be comfortable, you want to be laid back, you want to have outdoor music, you want to have lawn chairs, you want to have activities for the children, things that of that sort - family fun day. You know, you can have a family fun day and invite business leaders, but make sure they know it's a family fun day, you know.

Michelle Higgs: So they know what

Sonya Manners: Yes, they're not coming in their suits and ties. They'll eat a hotdog.

Michelle Higgs: Dripping barbecue on his shirt.

Sonya Manners: Right, right.

Michelle Higgs: I understand.

Sonya Manners: But you have to keep the event focus in mind. We have given events – charity fundraising events at local businesses where we've had the facility donated, we've had the food donated, and we've had entertainment donated, and all we had to come up with is the theme, you know, decorating. And 95 percent of the proceeds came back to the center where you want to give these individuals some type of in-kind donation for their efforts. If not, the recognition of using their business.

Michelle Higgs: I see, I see. Now, when you talk about looking at funders and approaching people, because we've talked in here about having things donated and getting this donated and that donated, I have had – it has been my experience to go to centers and, you know, hear that I don't know how to ask, I don't know what to say, I don't know where to go. Do you have any enlightenment on those points? The one thing I said is you can't be afraid to do anything.

Sonya Manners: Right, right.

Michelle Higgs: You would have to go out. And again, that goes back to what you were saying about passion ...

Sonya Manners: Yes, you have to the passion.

Michelle Higgs: ... you know, because if you're passionate about it, you can do it.

Sonya Manners: If you personally don't know how to ask, believe me, there's someone in your organization that has the guts to do it, that can stand up and say, look, this is what we need and can you help us. All you have to do is show a need. I've done cold calling on the telephone. I'll get the Yellow Pages out. If I'm looking to do an outdoor event, I call companies – I've called

companies like the bread store – the local big bread store, like Wonder Bread, well, can I talk to your community relations' person. Community relations, hi, my name is blah, blah, blah, I represent Neighborhood Networks, we have a community learning center here and we're looking to do a fundraiser event for our children book literacy program. And this event is going to be held, maybe hopefully at least a month to two months in advance, you're giving them fair enough warning and you're asking them for what your need is. Well, OK, I'm calling the bread store, I'm not going to ask them for the hotdogs.

Michelle Higgs: Yes, OK.

Sonya Manners: I need enough bread to feed 250 people. Is that something you can help me with?

The only thing they could do is say, "yes or no."

Michelle Higgs: Yes.

Sonya Manners: So once you tap into a company or an individual – if it's a corporation – a big company, you want to speak to their community relations' person. They, companies have these departments set up for sole purposes like what we do is look for funders. And if it's a smaller mom and pop organization, you can go into a store, a local grocery store and say, well, I would like to speak to the owner, don't speak to the store manager, don't speak to the onsite supervisor at the time, or even the clerk that's operating the cash register. You want to speak to the owner. You know ...

Michelle Higgs: OK.

Sonya Manners: ... you go to the top and if the top leads you down to the bottom, then guess what, well, I can say Tom Shepherd referred me to you since Tom is the owner.

Michelle Higgs: Making that person extremely important ...

Sonya Manners: Yes, I got referred to you by the owner and this is what I need.

Michelle Higgs: Yes.

Sonya Manners: It's called the name game, OK.

Michelle Higgs: So – I'm sorry, go ahead.

Sonya Manners: Go ahead.

Michelle Higgs: If you are – I guess what – I was thinking about everybody needs to know what the company does or what the center does ...

Sonya Manners: Right.

Michelle Higgs: And when you are going to ask for assistance, you need to know – you need to know what the company you're asking does ...

Sonya Manners: Correct

Michelle Higgs: ... you don't go for hotdogs to a company that does bread ...

Sonya Manners: Right.

Michelle Higgs: ... because that probably lessens your – I'm not trying to say validity. But, you know, you obviously don't know what you're doing if you're asking me for hotdogs and I don't make hotdogs.

Sonya Manners: Right.

Michelle Higgs: And then it goes even further, if you are looking for, for lack of a better word, the big bucks, you wouldn't go to Dell and ask them for software because they have the hardware ...

Sonya Manners: Right.

Michelle Higgs: ... or Hewlett-Packard or whatever because the likelihood of you getting what you want or even getting response to your request is diminished.

Sonya Manners: Correct.

Michelle Higgs: My other question to you is when there are so many different vehicles: challenge grants, charitable donations, in kind, operating, how did you learn about the differences between all of these different things? Or was it experience itself or mentoring?

Sonya Manners: Well, I have to say, Michelle, I learned the hard way just by researching. No one sat me down and explained all this to me. As you stated, I've written quite a few grants here at Dartmouth Square. I've written a total of nine and I have to say I begin them spiritually. I've put Him before everything and it seems like I've gotten all nine. I have yet to be turned down ...

Michelle Higgs: Wow!

Sonya Manners: ...for ones that I've personally written

Michelle Higgs: Yes.

Sonya Manners: So that, within itself, is a success story but I've never went to any school to educate myself on it. I kind of learned the hard way by just getting in there in the trenches and working it. When I wrote our Drug Elimination Grant, I didn't have a clue of what a business plan was, I had to do one. So our business plan was done from scratch. I didn't have the START program.

Michelle Higgs: OK, OK.

Sonya Manners: So the START program, as you, you know, hit on is a very key, key ingredient for the new centers. That is your bread and butter. Once you get that program all filled out and etched in stone and I's dotted and T's crossed, that right there is your vehicle.

Michelle Higgs: OK.

Sonya Manners: I mean you could take that to the local bank. Banks have an obligation to invest in a local community. If you can count five banks within your zip code, guess what, I will be first at the five banks. I don't care how much competition they have against each other. And when I have my event, all five of their names are going to be on the banner. Blah, blah, blah helped me with this, Standard Federal helped me with this, and Bank One helped me with this ...

Michelle Higgs: Yes, yes, yes.

Sonya Manners: ... you know, so I could care less what the competitions are but that START program for the new centers is a key, key, key thing to do. As I've stated, I did my business plan by hand and it was not an easy task and it did not get approved on the first go-round.

Michelle Higgs: Oh ...

Sonya Manners: It took me a couple of ...

Michelle Higgs: No tries.

Sonya Manners: ... a couple of tries. I would suggest to people to network and hit the – hit the Neighborhood Networks Web site. It has a lot of funding advice on it, and once you get connected with a grant or a RFP, call that company. These philanthropies want to give you their money. They will help you to write the grant. They definitely will. They will help you to write those grants. They will tell you what they want, how they want it, what font they want it in, how many pieces of paper they want, what size the paragraph, how many words supposed to be in the paragraph, everything. The Beaumont grant was the most easiest grant ever because it was all computerized. It was all on the Internet.

Michelle Higgs: Wow!

Sonya Manners: It even told me when I was over 500 words, right. OK, girl, you're two wordy.

Michelle Higgs: Step back a little bit.

Sonya Manners: Yes, so I know I probably went off the Richter scale with that. I talked about the START program and I talk about the philanthropists. You know the nonprofit organizations that grant out money.

Michelle Higgs: You hit on two important points. I mean, you did my commercial for START so I will be forever indebted to you. That's great. But, you know, the things that you've mentioned, particularly with – that was going to be one of my questions with regard to what folks want and

what the philanthropists want when they're, you know, looking at your – looking at your grant, there is in the Neighborhood Networks library of material that we have available, we have a funding guide and there's a list of things that go into a grant.

Sonya Manners: Right.

Michelle Higgs: And my own experience has taught me that if you're, you know, going after some funds and the funding store says, you know, write upside down on the page in purple ink, then you ...

Sonya Manners: Yes.

Michelle Higgs: ... better do that, you know. That's what they want. And so, you know, you need to follow the directions, number one, and it's very key. And like you're saying also that they want to give away the money and they're telling you the exact format that they want to see this material in, and if it's – as you know, there's no guarantees, but if you do it the way they ask, then the likelihood of you're being considered and, you know, approved for the funds is far greater ...

Sonya Manners: Correct.

Michelle Higgs: ... you know, than if you go off on a tangent somewhere.

Sonya Manners: On your own – your own little island.

Michelle Higgs: With no money.

Sonya Manners: Right, with no money. Michelle, I'd like to give you a couple of other things that we've done here at Dartmouth Square.

Michelle Higgs: Sure.

Sonya Manners: In our networking efforts, we've connected with agencies that do the same thing that we do and one of them is the Weed and Seed program. It's a United States Department of Justice Initiative and this Initiative is to weed out the bad and seed in the good, you know.

Michelle Higgs: OK.

Sonya Manners: It's real crazy; the people say Weed and Seed, what you got, weed and seed? No. Yeah, right.

Michelle Higgs: OK.

Sonya Manners: No. But this is an agency that was put together by the United States Department of Justice and their goal is to attack it at a young age. They have what is called DEFY, which is Drug Enforcement for Young People, and they're educating young people on how not to get caught up in things like that and they have safe havens.

Michelle Higgs: I see.

Sonya Manners: Well, guess what my center is. It's one of those Weed and Seed safe havens.

Michelle Higgs: Wonderful.

Sonya Manners: So because I've connected with this nonprofit agency, I now tap into some of the funding that they have.

Michelle Higgs: I see.

Sonya Manners: You know those new Beaumont computers that we got?

Michelle Higgs: Yes.

Sonya Manners: Well, they came with beautiful new software and those eight computers that we had that had old, outdated, antiquated Windows 98, Weed and Seed upgraded all of our computers – our old computer software to Windows 2000.

Michelle Higgs: Great. Well, I'm going to ask you two questions. First of all, I've gotten so caught up in listening to your descriptions here ...

Sonya Manners: That's fine.

Michelle Higgs: ... that I've let the time go by but I want to ask one question and then I do want to open up really quickly to our listeners. How would people get in touch with the Weed and Seed program? Is that a national thing that everyone – is there a Web site that you might have?

Sonya Manners: Yes, ma'am. It is a national. You would go under the Department of Justice ...

Michelle Higgs: OK.

Sonya Manners: ... and I would think go into the link of Weed and Seed.

Michelle Higgs: OK, OK, with the Weed and Seed link. OK. Well, I think – I want to thank you. As I said, I just got completely lost in what we were talking about and that's not a good thing but good in that I hope people got a good bit of information. James, I'd like to go to calls. Do we have anyone in the queue?

Operator: Thank you. Today's question-and-answer session will be conducted electronically. If you would like to ask a question, you may do so by pressing the star key followed by the digit one on your touch-tone telephone. If you're using a speakerphone, please make sure your mute function is turned off to allow your signal to reach our equipment. Once again, that's star one if you have a question and we'll pause for a moment.

Michelle Higgs: Thank you, Sonya.

Sonya Manners: You're welcome.

Operator: And once again, that is star one if you have a question.

Sonya Manners: While we're waiting on questions, Michelle, we probably want to talk about Comcast also.

Michelle Higgs: Oh, the other – the other company ...

Sonya Manners: The other major partner...

Michelle Higgs: OK, let's see if we have a question first and then we'll go into that if there's none.
James?

Operator: Ms. Higgs, there are no questions at this time.

Michelle Higgs: OK.

Sonya Manners: All right.

Michelle Higgs: OK, Sonya, go ahead and describe that then.

Sonya Manners: Oh, we were pretty thorough ...

Michelle Higgs: Yes, that's great.

Sonya Manners: ...or too wordy, one.

Michelle Higgs: Yes, one of the other.

Sonya Manners: Yes, another one of our major partners is Comcast, and as you know, Comcast Cable offers movie – you know, the movies but they also have Internet access and because a hundred percent of my property has Comcast access in the apartments, I approached them for free Internet access. It wasn't an easy task and it wasn't like it happened overnight. It took me like four years to beat this man down and call him everyday and that's what you talk about persistence.

Michelle Higgs: Persistence.

Sonya Manners: Persistent counts. If he didn't get a message from me once a week, I'd be shocked.

Michelle Higgs: Something was wrong, right?

Sonya Manners: I put it on a tickler to make sure that I called him every week, and in a four-year process, we now have free Comcast Internet.

Michelle Higgs: Oh, this is fabulous. Well, you brought up two good points, and I hope, you know, folks get this, that you use the people that you use everyday, like your banks you mentioned ...

Sonya Manners: Yes.

Michelle Higgs: ... and, you know, they – you put deposits into their banks and they have an obligation to help the communities that they have deposits from.

Sonya Manners: Correct.

Michelle Higgs: And then you had, you know, Comcast all over your apartment complex and it was only right to ask them for assistance, you know.

Sonya Manners: The management company.

Michelle Higgs: Yes, exactly, exactly. James, I'm going to ask again, do we have any questions on queue?

Operator: There are no questions in the queue at this time. However, I would like to remind everyone to press star one if you do have a question.

Michelle Higgs: OK.

Sonya Manners: OK.

Michelle Higgs: Well, I think we have been very thorough.

Operator: Pardon the interruption. We do have a question from Jerryl Bennett.

Michelle Higgs: OK. Hi, Jerryl.

Jerryl Bennett: Hey. How are you all?

Michelle Higgs: Good.

Sonya Manners: Hi, Jerryl.

Jerryl Bennett: I thought this was very thorough. We have some national partners already with the Neighborhood Networks or HUD program. Have you had any experiences with leveraging some of those relationships, you know, to get things out of – we have NASA, for instance, you know. Any of the, you know, national partners that we already have, have you knocked on their door and what results did you get?

Sonya Manners: Well, I actually have to say that the Beaumont Foundation is one of Neighborhood Networks national partners and it was a successful event when I first spoke with Ms. Virginia Peoples from Neighborhood Networks. It was a conference call set up by Michele Thomas, the head of BCT group, and this conference led to the initial – the initiative letter; the letter that you have to send out to them to even see if they want you to apply for the grant. And once it came from there, I just phoned them constantly during the grantwriting process and created a relationship with them. And I did get to meet Ms. Virginia Peoples from the Beaumont Foundation this year in Florida. So after speaking with her on numerous occasions over the phone, we finally got to meet. So I think that within itself was a good relationship. Did that help you?

Jerryl Bennett: Oh, you know, it's just – it all comes out that you're just a highly energetic and persistent entity.

Sonya Manners: Is that a – that's a compliment. Thank you.

Jerryl Bennett: Those who don't have such persistency, however, you know, have the, you know, nevertheless the center really want to do a good job ...

Sonya Manners: Right.

Jerryl Bennett: ... but just don't have, you know, your moxie.

Sonya Manners: Right. Well, like I say, if the person that's – you know, the director, if they don't have that “umph” to go out there and network what it is they're doing, I'm pretty sure they got a resident, that feel passionate about what they've learned, and want to tell the world. You ever heard that story a person new to church always want to tell everybody what they just learned? Have that philosophy, you know. Somebody new to the program might be the best person to sell the product.

Jerryl Bennett: That's very interesting. You've been involved with it?

Sonya Manners: Yes, you know, if – and maybe you might be the person that have worked at it so long that you're tired of hitting the pavement, and if that is the case, then you need to get some fresh blood in there. You need to get something fresh and reviving to sell what you're doing. And the objective is you want to help your community. You want to help the people that's around you to thrive in the world that's around them. The world is not stopping for anybody. The only time it stops is when, you know, our eyes close.

Jerryl Bennett: One last question. Via the IRS have you thought about, you know, linking with the Earned Income Tax Credit initiative?

Sonya Manners: Yes, I have. Yes, I have because there's a lot of individuals that I see pay a lot of money to have their income taxes done and we are definitely looking at that. Have you done that?

Jerryl Bennett: I'm going to go speak – well, I'm a Neighborhood Networks Coordinator in Richmond and I'm going to speak to the housing – management of housing – Affordable Housing Management Association in October and it sure would be nice if a person like you were in front of, you know, Earned Income Tax Credit plus Neighborhood Networks to benefit whom and ...

Sonya Manners: Well, you know what, I give you this suggestion. When you go, do your homework on what you're trying to sell, and once you do your homework tell the advantages that – the advantages of it and how it'll help the people. And then tell them how they tie-in to it, it will show the people that they care. You know, people want to know that other people care about them. I'm not just here to take your rent money; I'm here to help you.

Michelle Higgs: Well, you've made a valid point and one that I hear often when speaking with folks around the country. Is that it, Jerryl?

Jerryl Bennett: Yes, ma'am. Thanks.

Michelle Higgs: OK, thank you.

Sonya Manners: Thank you, Jerryl. Have a blessed day.

Jerryl Bennett: You too, thanks.

Michelle Higgs: James, anyone else on queue?

Operator: There are no further questions at this time.

Sonya Manners: All right.

Michelle Higgs: Well, it looks like we've really come to the end of our time here and we started a hair late, but I think we should probably end so that folks don't get totally confused.

Sonya, I want to thank you so much for sharing your time today and your information. And once again, I think that so thoroughly did you cover the topic that there weren't very many questions this time and I do appreciate that.

I want to remind everyone that you can contact Neighborhood Networks through its information line at 1 (888) 312-2743 and you can also find a lot of resources and information on the Neighborhood Networks Web site, which is www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org.

Again, I thank you so much for joining us in conversation today. This is the last in this series of calls for this year and I encourage you all to watch your e-mail for the next announcement. I have very much appreciated being your moderator for this series and I thank you for your participation. Again, if you have any questions about Neighborhood Networks or START, you can ring the toll-free Information Line at (888) 312-2743. Thanks again for joining us today. And thank you, Sonya.

Sonya Manners: Thank you, Michelle, for inviting me. It was ...

Michelle Higgs: Right.

Sonya Manners: ... a blast.

Michelle Higgs: Take good care now.

Sonya Manners: Everybody, have a blessed day.

Michelle Higgs: All right. You do the ...

Sonya Manners: Bye-bye.

Michelle Higgs: ... same. Thank you.

Operator: And that concludes today's conference call. We thank you for your participation and have a nice day.

END